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AL-HAKIM AL TIRMIDHI AND TERESA OF AVILA: THE SEVEN STAGE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

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Abstract:

The core feature of the spiritual life is human and divine desiring. Understanding and facing our desires as well as comprehending the desires of the Divine, remain a struggle for the human soul. Spiritual directors are likely to spend a considerable amount of time on this struggle and need to develop great skill in recognizing and responding to their directees' desire for God and in helping them discern and unveil the illusory desires. This article explores the theories and insights of the spiritual stage theory from Islam through Sufism using the psychology of Al-Hakim al Tirmidhi and Christianity through Teresa of Avila, and the spiritual direction best suited for spiritual directees at the different stages. The exchange of both of these approaches presented here can perhaps enrich the spiritual directors' style to travellers along the spiritual journey who come to them for direction. This mystical spirituality, articulated in Sufism from the Stations (*maqamat*) of Hakim Al-Tirmidhi and the mansions of Teresa of Avila, though experienced within different spiritual frameworks, brings a commonality in the exchange between them. Their experience of God both as directees and as *Shaykh* or Spiritual Director has much to offer to present day spiritual directors.

Keywords:

spiritual direction • Maqamat • Mansions • stages • Shaykh • director • directee

In life, one of the questions to help us develop a clear focus to guide our life activities is - What do I want?/What do we really want? The core feature of the spiritual life is human and divine desiring. There has been a tradition of explaining and describing the spiritual journey in some religions with stages of development which are further described with numbers, places or images. The mystical tradition of Islam (Sufism) began early in its history to speak of the 'stations' (*maqamat*) along the spiritual path. Various numbers were given but the number seven first appeared in the writings of the Sufi master As-Sarraj (988) and then later Farid ad-din Attar (1230). These stations (*maqamat*) was referred to as the Stations of the Heart by al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, a ninth century Sufi mystic and author. The Jewish mystical commentary the Zohar, compiled by Moses de Leon (1250-1305) speaks of progressive ecstatic stages known as the Seven Halls of Heaven. De Leon lived in Avila, Spain for many years in the latter part of his life. The Catholic mystic Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada (1515-1582) also lived in Avila as a Carmelite religious. Possibly familiar with de Leon's Seven Halls of Heaven she wrote her own theory of seven mansions in the Interior Castle in 1577.

Our desires energize and our spiritual quest can lead us to God in surprising ways. A greater surprise is that God longs for us as much, perhaps even more than we do for God. Mechthild of Magdeburg describes both the "Soul's" desiring and God's desiring.

She says from our side this is how the soul speaks to God:

God, you are my lover,
My longing,
My flowing stream,
My sun,
And I am your reflection.

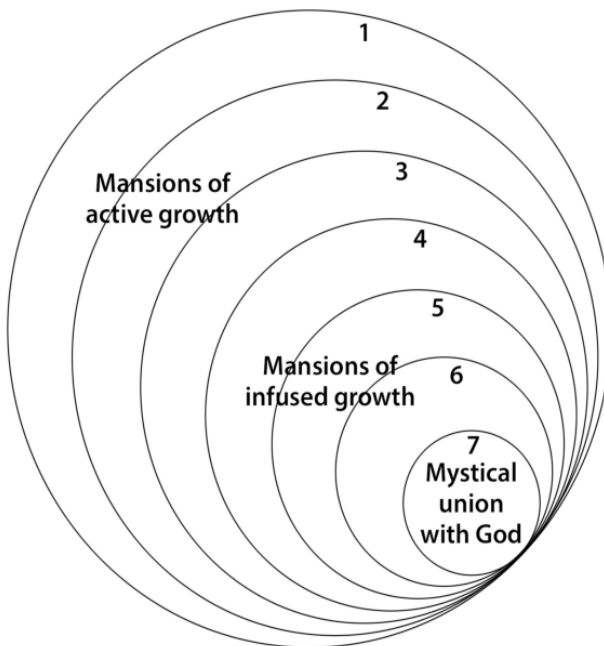
From God's side, this is how God answers the soul:

It is my nature that makes me love you often,
For I am love itself.
It is my longing that made me love you intensely
For I yearn to be loved from the heart.
It is my eternity that makes me love you long
For I have no end.¹

Understanding and facing our desires remains a struggle for the human soul. It is so prevalent in human experience and in the human heart that spiritual directors are likely to spend a considerable amount of time on focusing on the directees' desires. Spiritual directors need to develop great skill in recognizing and responding to their directees' desire for God and in helping them discern and unveil the illusory desires.

This article explores the theories and insights of the spiritual stage theory from Islam through Sufism using the psychology of Al-Hakim al Tirmidhi and Christianity through Teresa of Avila, and the spiritual direction best suited for spiritual directees at the different stages. The exchange of both of these approaches presented here can perhaps enrich the spiritual directors' style to travellers along the spiritual journey who come to them for direction.

The Interior Castle of St. Teresa of Avila



The seven mansions of Teresa's interior castle -Ashbrook

This structural approach has been critiqued as being hierarchical for implying that people at the 'higher stages are holier than those at the lower stages. However, Teresa, held that God bestows the Divine Self on everyone according to their capacity and ability to receive it.² Teresa saw the stages of the spiritual journey (mansions) as progression in the development of our capacity to be intimate with God. The stages are fluid as we move back and forth between them depending on the circumstances or we may even experience more than one at a time.

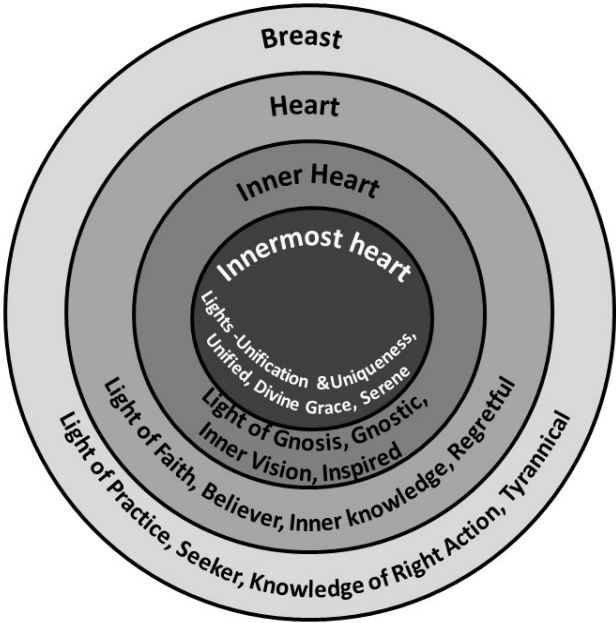
Teresa sees the soul as a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendor, illumining and beautifying them all. The nearer one got to the center, the stronger was the light; outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark and infested with toads, vipers and other venomous creatures.

The Sets of Mansions presents a model of the human soul as a castle cut from a single diamond. This castle is divided into seven groups of mansions, beginning at the outer gate and moving inward toward the center. We enter the castle whenever we pray, for the gate to the outermost mansion is prayer. (Those who never pray remain in a courtyard outside the gate with the toads and all that is foul. People in this state are stuck in sin.) The first three mansions are considered to be ordinary prayer or active prayer. Mansions 4-7 are considered to be contemplative prayer (Mystical or passive.)³ This imagery of Teresa's interior castle mirrors that of the circular path of Tirmidhi.

The Stages of the Heart of Al Hakim al Tirmidhi

According to Sufi⁴ Psychology and the sufi mystic al Tirmidhi, the heart (referring to it as a place in the body) has four stations; the breast, the heart, the inner heart and the innermost heart. They fit within each other like nested concentric circles. The breast is the outermost circle, the heart and the inner heart are in the two middle circles and the kernel of the heart is at the center. It can be pictured below:

Stations of the heart



Each station is also associated with different spiritual stages in Sufism, different levels of knowledge and understanding and different levels of self and levels of the heart in the journey of the soul.⁵

1.Breast	3.Heart	5. Inner Heart	7. Innermost Heart
2.Light of Practice	4. Light of Faith	6. Light of Gnosis	Lights of Unification and Uniqueness
Seeker	Believer	Gnostic	Unified
Knowledge of right action	Inner knowledge	Inner vision	Divine grace
tyrannical	Regretful	Inspired	Serene

Stage 1:

In Islam, the Quran and *Sunna/Hadith* (the example and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad –saw) describe the stages or stations of a spiritual traveller’s path to God, prescribing a set of guidelines for achieving them.

(The guidelines are considered a stage as well). In the mystical tradition of Islam-Sufism-spiritual states (*hal*) are experienced as the stations of the spiritual journey (*maqam/makam*). The progress however, through the stations is not met by the seeker's own effort, "his advance from *makam* to *makam* is entirely by God's work and is God's gift –not of his own acquisition" ⁶. In Sufism, the first station is *tawba* or *tauba* – repentance and conversion, the turning of the heart away from self and inordinate attachments to God

Al-Tirmidhi refers to this station as the Breast. The Breast, the outermost layer is directly affected by our words and actions and is nourished by devotion, prayer, charity, service and the practice of fundamental principles found in all traditions and religions. With positive actions, patience, sincerity, steadfast practice of prayer, the breast is cleansed, opening it to the three stages of acquiring knowledge as described by Al-Jilani (d.1166): religious precepts (*Shariah*), eliminating the multiplicity of the ego (*nafi*) to reach a state and way of unity with the creator (*tariqah*) and reaching the state of Divine Wisdom (*marifah*)⁷. The Arabic word for Breast, *sadr*, means 'heart and mind' and in Indonesian it stands for 'awareness'. By re-evaluating one's life, one changes direction from oneself to God. It is the beginning of the battle with the ego. Prayer at this stage consists of Divine remembrance (*dhikr*), worship at home or in the mosque, night vigils, and recital of the Quran.

In Christianity, Pseudo-Dionysius gave names to three recognized levels of faith: the Purgative Way – for those concerned with sin and evil in one's life; the Illuminative Way – those concerned with illuminating their souls with virtue and the Unitive Way – those who have attained a deep, constant union with God.⁸ In Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*, the seven mansions fit into this scheme: one to three are Purgative, four and five are Illuminative and six and seven belong to the Unitive Way.

Like those in the first station of Al-Tirmidhi, in Teresa's first mansion, the mansion of devotion, "the soul is so worldly and preoccupied with earthly riches, honors, and affairs, that...it is prevented by these distractions and seems unable to overcome so many obstacles" ⁹ People however at this stage begin to experience an awakening in the spiritual life through devotion, a longing for God and an awareness of love in the depths of the heart. The work of those in this mansion is to grow in self-

knowledge, begin to become free from attachments and identifications of the ego. They face the reality of internal deceptions, doubts and confusion.

Both, Al-Tirmidhi and Teresa see the first stage of the spiritual journey as one of turning away from sin and worldly attachments and turning towards God – a redirection and reorientation of the self (ego).

Spiritual Direction for Stage 1

Sufi spiritual directors – *Shaykhs* begin by having their directees – *murid* face their faults, be repentant of them and then become detached from them. The work with their shadow side, developing their consciousness of it, not to wallow in guilt but to accept the reality of their weaknesses is an exercise done in prayer and meditation (remembrance – *dhikr*). The directees begin to feel a pull towards the Beloved and begin to submit to this attraction. Once they start experiencing the Beloved, they start forgetting the self, transfusing to the higher self. This is the beginning of the journey of learning to place their trust in God rather than oneself with all its inadequacies. The *Shaykh* guides the directee towards moving from a limited image of God to a living image of God. “You love God, because God is your Beloved, not because you want something.”¹⁰

Teresa also emphasized the importance of a spiritual guide in this first stage when the directees are not strong enough to defend themselves from their doubts, fears, confusion, dilemmas, and resistance to a new self-knowledge which results from freeing themselves of the inordinate attachments. Teresa echoes the Sufi approach by warning against too much self-absorption. She encourages her directees to look constantly at Jesus Christ and follow His example. In doing this.

they will move from looking at Jesus to being looked at by Jesus. They will gain a new self-knowledge because they are seeing themselves through the eyes of Jesus, thus gaining a greater self-knowledge. “We shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God.”¹¹

In this stage the directee is helped to see God as a loving rather than a punishing parent. For those beginning on the journey through the mansions, “the door of entry into the castle is prayer and meditation.”¹²

The Spiritual Director’s role is that of a helper, sensitive to the interplay between the ego of the directee and God’s intervention. The director does not hinder God’s movements in the directee by imposing one’s own interpretation of Scripture or theology.

Stage 2

The second Sufi station is *nara'*, watchfulness or fear of God and abstention. Watchfulness here is to be watchful/alert of what Al-Tirmidhi terms as doing the right action, practicing what we know to be right. The watchfulness comes from two sources from outside, and from inside. Rumi refers to these two processes of knowing as the 'complete intellect' and the 'acquired intellect'. The acquired intellect has many levels and each level acquires knowledge from the outside. The complete intellect knows from within.

The intellect is of two kinds:

- The first is acquired from outside. You learn it...from books, teachers, reflection and rote, from concepts and from excellent and new sciences.
- The second is acquired from inside. Your intellect becomes greater than that of others, but you are heavily burdened because of your acquisition so....Seek the fountain from within yourself.

At this second stage a deeper longing for God is experienced. At times ruled by cleverness. This is intelligence without faith in anything outside ourselves. This is termed the tyrannical self. There is a spark of this in everyone. We may have to look closely to see it because the tyrannical self is an expert in hiding from our consciousness. It seems to speak with our 'own voice' and to express our own innermost desires, so we rarely resist it.

For Teresa, in the second mansion "are found souls which have begun to practice prayer; they realize the importance of their not remaining in the first mansion, yet often lack determination to quit their present condition by avoiding occasions of sin, which is a very perilous state to be in."¹³ Teresa expressed the abstention as detachment. She identified different elements for each mansion to distinguish one from the other and she named the second mansion as 'conversion', the mansion of purification. For Teresa, conversion in this mansion meant 'doing something' about the shoddiness of the way life is lived, of doing the right action. The action of detaching oneself from everything that is not God and from self-love and self-indulgence, that is the death of the ego. It is choosing to align one's will with God's will. Teresa saw little capacity in people at this stage to receive God's communication directly. The experience of God for them is through human relationships, nature, music.

Having begun a reorientation of the ego, Al-Tirmidhi and Teresa see a similar movement as spiritual travelers go deeper into their response to the Divine attraction by freeing themselves from their ego-attachments.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 2

At this second stage, the Sufi *Shaykh* accompanies their directees in the state of awakened consciousness and remembrance of God by helping them to focus on constant spiritual discrimination and attentiveness for distractions. They are then directed from attentiveness to these attachments towards renunciation of both their attachments and attentiveness to them.

According to Teresa, spiritual guidance at this stage focuses on the person's tendency to have second thoughts, procrastination, delays, grief, fear, repugnance and resistance. They are helped to assess and reassess their lives and the internal values, own their shadow side and the experience of darkness.

Directees find it hard to do this and the unconscious strategy is 'forgetting'. The directee fails to remember the experience either immediately after it occurred or after talking about it in spiritual direction. Usually the most important aspects of the experience are forgotten so that the experience ceases to invite the directee to respond or act on its implications¹⁴. Spiritual directors help their directees to become aware of their experiences in the presence of a loving God. This change of their God image may cause confusion but they are directed to surrender to God and trust that they will be treated well.

Spiritual Directors in this stage of the soul needs to ask how the directee goes about prayer, at what time and where does the directee pray. The questions asked by the director may uncover the cause that blocks the directee's openness to God's presence.

Stage 3

Zuhd' (asceticism, renunciation or detachment) is the third station. As part of the ongoing battle with the ego, seekers attempt to detach themselves from love of their possessions and begin to reduce the number of things or clutter they possess. Al Tirmidhi calls this stage the Heart. This is opened when our outermost heart is cleaned. Actions that harm others or violate universal spiritual principles tend to close or harden

the heart. To be a person of the heart means to have a soft, vulnerable, sensitive and knowing heart. This is a step taken further from stage two. Fear turns to hope. Al Ghazali (d.1111) taught that hope motivates people at this stage to worship God as they become conscious of God's mercy and their intense longing for God's blessings.

For Teresa, the third stage is the mansion of sincerity where the experience of God is still indirect. She sees that this is the stage of most good people who "are very desirous not to offend His Majesty even by venial sins, they love penance and spend hours in meditation, they employ their time well, exercise themselves in works of charity to their neighbors, are well ordered in their conversation and dress."¹⁵ Teresa sees a danger here as this new way of living and being leads people to thinking that they are wiser and more spiritual than they actually are. This becomes a block to the in-breaking of God into their mansion and tests the sincerity of their desire for a continued surrender to God. In this third mansion, the spiritual sweetness of the first two mansions begin to dry up, and the soul feels dry. This however is not a sign of regression but of progression, as Giles says so well, "God relates to the soul in ways that are too delicate to be discerned by the senses and emotions."¹⁶

Al Tirmidhi's third stage the Heart and Teresa's third mansion describe the stage where people, through detachment, letting go, begin to experience love rather than fear of God as their motivation.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 3

Spiritual direction in Sufism for moves the directee in three steps at this stage. First they are challenged to let go of their desire for worldly gain and improvement. Second, the *Shaykh* becomes the "beloved executioner" by helping the directee remove the block of the ego that comes in the way of progress, to give up the inner desire for all benefits for the self, even spiritual states. Third the directee is encouraged to realize the worthlessness of their own spiritual realization because even their spiritual renunciation is about them and not God.¹⁷

Teresa recommends that the directee, when in this mansion needs to have someone more advanced than they are to give them light and urge them on because the complacency of some people in the third mansion prefer not to be challenged. Spiritual direction needs to focus

on the directee's interior tests to surrender and trust God especially in times of aridity. The directee also needs to be challenged to assume adult responsibility for their own decisions rather than surrender that to others, the church authorities, and to respond to God's invitation to a relationship of companionship, guidance, love and support.

The Spiritual Director in this stage is a kind listener and gentle support, exposing the ways in which the powers of evil and pride attempt to block the directee's ability to respond to God. The directee needs to be constantly reminded that God continues to be present giving the necessary grace of strength and light.

Stage 4

The fourth station of the Sufi path is *faqr* or poverty. A saying describes this stage: "The life of the heart is in the knowledge of God alone." Al Tirmidhi says that heart knowledge is deepened by experience, experience of faith. Or what is called the Light of Faith. The Light of Faith is like a wonderful lamp that has been covered with many layers of veils. Although the light is full and perfect, we need to remove the veils that obscure it. It is our job to uncover the light that God placed within our hearts and to pray that God helps us to make our efforts bear fruit. At this stage we begin to understand the negative effects of our habitual self-centered approach to the world, even though we do not yet have the ability to change. Our regretful self, our misdeeds now begin to become repellent to us. We enter a cycle of erring, regretting our mistakes and then erring again. The blaming – regretful self is that which has become illuminated by the light of the heart which knows that God is the source of all.

This station is Teresa's mansion of transition and transformation, the first stage of the Illuminative Way. She saw that we ourselves do the work of the first three stages whereas in stages four to seven the channels of communication come straight from the Source. We now begin to touch the supernatural. This is the stage of infused, mystical contemplation, pure gift that we cannot achieve ourselves. It is offered to all who have the capacity to receive it. It purifies and transforms us. Prayer changes to what Teresa calls the Prayer of Quiet, a deepening of the recollection of the senses and faculties which brings peace, quiet and humility as well as a sense of deep joy, love and awe "as if in these interior depths there

were a brazier on which were cast sweet perfumes”¹⁸ Some begin to have what Teresa calls the ‘light on’ experience of an overwhelming sense of the reality of God. Although even if there is ‘light off’ experience when combined with deep, authentic desire for God, indicates the beginnings of infused contemplation. Contemplation is Divine union, in which the Lord takes His delight in the soul and soul takes delight in God.

In this fourth stage, Al-Tirmidhi and Teresa emphasize different sides of the same coin, *faqr* - poverty is the predisposition for the Prayer of Quiet to occur.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 4

The *Shaykhs*, aware that their directees could be experiencing fear, even terror at this stage reminds them of the words of Jalaluddin Rumi, Sufi mystic and poet “Having nothing and wanting nothing”. The directees are encouraged to let go of all their expectations even spiritual ones and remain totally open and only observe, not asking for anything, refusing anything, resisting nothing, judging nothing, changing nothing, just open. God can give what God wants and take what God wants. Its not being a ‘doormat’ but learning to say ‘yes’ to what is higher in oneself and in life. It is stepping out of the ego into one’s true self, the gateway to the divine.

For Teresa, the spiritual director assist their directees in constant discernment. They help them to clarify illusory desires from authentic desires; explore the sense of intensity, comfort or discomfort in their growing closeness to God; to explore their feelings in response to this unitive experience and whether they are willing to embrace the changes that bring them what they desire. The spiritual director encourages the directee to move from structured forms of prayer to more spontaneous, personalized and creative ways of praying. The entry into this mansion takes the directee through the gateway to the divine.

Spiritual Directors in this stage help their directees to be aware of various movements within themselves, whether of consolation or desolation. They gently and firmly determine when it would be helpful to explain further the ways of discerning the sources of such movement so that the directee is better able to understand how to respond to God in their poverty.

Stage 5

The fifth Sufi station is *sabr* (patience). Al Tirmidhi calls this The Inner Heart, the place of inner vision. To reach here one needs patience of two kinds, one with physical pain and the second with self-control. Seekers in this stage remain steadfast in their faith whether in times of disaster or love. Both negative and positive experiences are met with the same unity and equilibrium of patience. Difference and diversity dissolve through interior renunciation and interior transformation. They have Divine proximity and have arrived at the truth. The *murid* learns patience like swallowing something bitter without showing distaste. These words captures this well “For thirty years I sought God, but when I looked carefully, I saw that in reality God was the Seeker and I the sought.”¹⁹ The seeker touches the *point vierge* (The Virgin point)²⁰ Those at the fifth station have begun to sense and experience their *point vierge*.

Teresa describes this mansion as the mansion of holiness where she experienced the prayer of union. She speaks of this mansion as a delicious death, for in the prayer of union, the soul is asleep, it has died entirely to this world, to live more truly than ever in God. A transition from the ego state to the mystical state. Although Teresa experienced this stage as a very interior love affair of pure joy, an awe and freedom, she also experienced it as a time of being tested and prepared for what she called the betrothal, which required even greater surrender. This was a transformation of will and not just feelings. In this mansion, it is not possible to underestimate how much pain, agony and suffering, often with great hardship, aloneness and renunciation, is experienced in this process of death and rebirth.

Patience is required. The deeper level of being of the Sufi *sabr* is echoed in Teresa’s new emergent being experienced in the prayer of union.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 5

In this stage the *Shaykh* watches the directee to see that patience is maintained in all circumstances. The guidance for the directee at this stage consists of warnings to retain self-control and avoid pride and ostentation. They must pay attention to the directee’s obedience to God, be indifferent to praise in which there is no benefit.

Teresa sees that people in this stage have set their compass on God. Therefore, spiritual guidance must ensure that the whole of their attention is focused on where God is and what God is asking of them now. They need to follow the compass in that direction and not go off course by focusing on what spiritual states or stages they might be experiencing in prayer. They are encouraged to stay in the present moment, aware, waiting, exploring the pain and suffering, aloneness and renunciation, death and rebirth that constitute the difficulties of coping with the intensity of such inner transformation and receptive to God's self-communication.

The spiritual director's role provides a stabilizing presence in helping the directee with this focus even if they themselves have not experienced the fifth mansion.

In this stage, the Spiritual Director facilitates the movement of God's grace within the directee so that the light and love of God inflame all possible life situations. Directors however should always remember that God is not only the Creator but truly the Director of the directee and therefore should never provide a hindrance to such an intimate communication.

Stage 6

Tawakkul (trust, surrender, knowledge, reliance, confidence) is the sixth station of the Sufi journey. Al Tirmidhi explains that for those who have arrived at this station, it is the place of inner vision and the locus of the Light of Gnosis. Gnosis means 'inner wisdom' or 'knowledge of spiritual truth'. The heart and the inner heart are closely linked and, at times almost indistinguishable. The heart knows and the inner heart sees. They complement each other. If knowledge and vision is combined, the unseen becomes seen, and we become certain in our faith. Those who have knowledge without vision are like scholars who have studied a foreign country for many years but have never visited it. Similarly, those who have vision without knowledge are like the tourists who visit a foreign country but know nothing of the country's language, history, or customs. Those who have reached this station are aware of a presence. They worship God as if they saw Him, and if they do not see God they are sure that God sees them. The inner heart's perception is true perception. The gnostic takes genuine pleasure in prayer. They begin to experience for themselves

the religious and spiritual truths that so far they have only heard about. They begin to feel genuine love for God and for others. This is called the inspired self because the self is now able to repent not as self-blame but as truly aware of the wrong doing and to vow never to do it again.²¹ They begin to hear the inner voice of guidance. They have reached into their point *virge*. However, the loss of self and the move into the love of God leads to confusion and uncertainty – to bewilderment. The soul surrenders with the certain knowledge that all is in God's Hand.

Teresa's sixth mansion – the mansion of sanctification is the shift from the Illuminative Way to the Unitive Way. It is the mansion "where the soul, wounded with love for its spouse sighs more than ever for solitude"²² The imagery that Teresa uses to describe her experience of this stage is that of the spiritual betrothal. It speaks of the actual living out of the passionate love begun in the previous mansion. This deeper movement inwards in essence is what Teresa calls the 'rapture' the wrenching of the self away from the self in order to live solely in God. The experience of 'favour' of the rapture, for Teresa is not important, what is really important is the surrender that has made this 'rapture' possible. For Teresa, this surrender means the way of the Cross. Dryness in prayer is an everyday experience. Suffering at this stage is neither to wallow in self-pity nor to be endured. For suffering to be of any value it has to purify and transform the self. Throughout the various moments of purification and transformation, the primary relationship with Jesus Christ is deepened. Teresa's frame of reference for her experience of the mutual desiring in her human-Divine intimacy was that of mystical romantic love. The sixth mansion brings with it a paradox of the presence as well as the absence of God. There is an hungry emptiness that no one can satisfy.

The sixth stage of the total surrender of *tawakkul* of the gnostic in Al Tirmidhi and Teresa's spiritual betrothal are both accompanied by suffering.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 6

The *Shaykh* encourages those at this station to acknowledge the longing for a direct communication with God. The directee is not satisfied unless they have a direct experience of God. A presential knowledge (*al-ilm ul huduri*) of God. This longing however brings with it pain and

weakness. The *Shaykh* helps the directee to face both the difficulty of feeling vulnerable and the temptation to escape from this pain. The *Shaykh* helps the directee to face acknowledge, own and face the pain. It is their job to keep this fire of love burning and to keep them alert to their hearts longing for God.

Teresa sees the great need for the Spiritual director to help the directee discern the internal and external trials, obstacles and opposition and a need for great courage faith and confidence. The danger in this stage is that the directee can fall victim to their own pride and self-delusion. They need the spiritual direction for objectivity and balance. They are encouraged to find a balance between contemplation and action. For those experiencing the romantic mystical path, the spiritual director has to help the directee to not take either consolation or desolation seriously but guide them to an ever deeper surrender to God. The strong presence of God can take the directee on a 'high' and the absence can make the directee fall 'low'. Although the latter can feel like a regression, it can actually be a sign that the directee is going deeper into the mansion of the soul.

In this sixth stage, Spiritual Directors provide the balance for the directee both in times of exhilaration and in times of discouragement. They need to be alert to the possibility of the directee journeying deeper into the mansion of the soul and assist the directee to explore this possible invitation.

Stage 7

In the final station, those on the spiritual journey have a stronger and deeper desire to be in union with the Creator and enter the state of *rida* – contentment. The ego is annihilated (*fana*) and the spiritual seekers experience pure love and joy in their union with God. The seeker, according to Al- Tirmidhi experiences true contentment only when the *innermost heart* is reached. It is infinite in its scope and radiance. It is like a great axis that remains stable as everything else revolves around it. All the heart's other lights are based on the innermost heart's Lights of Unification and the Uniqueness of God. The innermost heart is irrigated with the water of God's kindness, and its roots are filled with the lights of certainty. God cultivates the innermost heart directly, without any intermediary. The

deepest truths are understood only in this station and the seeker reaches the ultimate level of understanding. This means to transform oneself, to remove the veils that cover the light and to rest in the Light. The serene self, characterizes this resting. It is content with the present, with whatever is, with whatever God brings us. This serenity and contentment is rooted in the love of God.²³

When Teresa writes of the seventh mansion of union, words are inadequate to describe this state of union that only a few experience because it is very different from the previous mansions. The occasional unitive experiences of God of the sixth mansion now becomes a permanent state and Teresa herself experienced ecstatic visions. She describes it "This is the seventh mansion, for as He has a dwelling place in heaven, so has He in the soul, where none but He may abide and which may be termed a second heaven."²⁴ This, Teresa further explains as the "instantaneous communication of God to the soul."²⁵ She describes this final state as a spiritual marriage with Jesus. This union with Jesus gives her the entry into a relationship with the Trinity. All the longing and restlessness of the previous mansions now comes to stillness in the joy of a peaceful certainty that she rests habitually in God's presence.

In Sufi terms, Teresa had attained *fana* and reached the seventh station of *rida* – the innermost heart. She has moved from the point *virge*, no veil existed between her and her Beloved.

In Sufism, with the death of the *nafs* (ego), the self is completely immersed in the Divine in a state of contentment. This is similar to Teresa's Spiritual Marriage where the union and action in the world are entirely combined.

Spiritual Direction for Stage 7

The *Shaykh* is aware that the seeker in this stage is only to give thanks. It is the stage of gratitude. The seeker needs guidance to be aware of the spiritual ecstasy. Is it *seker* (mystical intoxication) or *sabu* (mystical sobriety)? Sobriety is when the spiritual wayfarer returns to their senses after an 'event' of spiritual ecstasy. Although spiritual ecstasy is God-given, the person can choose to return to sobriety. *Shaykhs* guide their directees towards sobriety as a more stable state than spiritual intoxication. They are advised to combine their mystical prayer with good actions.

Teresa's advice to spiritual directors who have directees in this mansion is to help them remember that these experiences come from the innermost mansion where only God dwells and the directee has to only praise and thank God immensely. Spiritual direction for the directee in a way is the same as in the sixth mansion of objectivity and accountability, in order that they prevent themselves from letting the power of experience go to their heads.

This is somewhat similar to the *Shaykh* bringing the directee to sobriety. The best assistance that the Spiritual Directors can offer their directee at this stage is to pray for them.

Conclusion

This mystical spirituality, articulated in Sufism from the Stations of Hakim Al-Tirmidhi and the mansions of Teresa of Avila, though experienced within different spiritual frameworks, there is a commonality in the exchange between them. Their experience of God both as directees and as *Shaykh* or Spiritual Director has much to offer to present day spiritual directors. While they may use the same methodology of spiritual direction with people at different stages, can be challenged by the difference in content experienced by spiritual directees.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Fiona Bowie, trans. Oliver Davies. *Beghine Spirituality* I.4; I.24; 55-56.
- 2 Ruth Burrows, in her book *Fire upon the Earth: Interior Castle Explored* explains that God it is not that God is generous with some and miserly with others, but rather God is always trying to enlarge our capacity to receive the Divine Presence.
- 3 While Teresa speaks of the seven mansions she also uses the imagery of Watering the Garden to explain the stages of prayer that a prayer-er experiences. The four stages are i. drawing water from the well to fill our bucket and water the garden (the soul), this needs a lot effort and practice ii. being able to fill our bucket from a water wheel where we have a little less work to do. The water wheel fills the bucket for us. iii. we use the water by which this garden is irrigated, that is, the water flowing the garden is irrigated with much less labor, although some labor is required to direct the flow of water. The Lord so desires to help the gardener here that He Himself becomes practically the gardener and the one who does everything. iv. here, we have no work to do—the “garden” of our soul is watered by God’s “rain” and we are passive receivers of this great gift. It is living the truth of Jesus’ statement, “but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”
- 4 A sufi is a mystic who follows the path of love in which God, or Truth, is experienced as the Beloved. The inner relationship of lover and Beloved is the core of the Sufi path. A sufi is a mystic in the Islamic tradition. The word Sufi itself is derived from the Persian word Suf – meaning wool or rough cloth which was worn by the Sufis as a sign of asceticism. The mystical experience of God is a state of oneness or unity with God. The four stages of the Sufi’s journey is i. from God. ii. to God, iii. in God. iv. with God. *Haqiqa* (Arabic *ḥaqīqah* “truth”) is one of “the four stages” in Sufism, *shari’a* (exoteric path), *tariqa* (esoteric path), *baqiqa* (mystical truth) and *marifa* (final mystical knowledge, *unio mystica*).
- 5 Frager Robert, *Heart, Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999
- 6 Suhrawardi, Sheikh Shahabuddin. *A Dervish Textbook*. Translated by H. Wilberforce-Clarke, 58-60.
- 7 Al-Jilani, Abd al-Quadir. *The Secret of Secrets*. Translated by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak. Cambridge, 14.
- 8 Michael, Chester P. *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction: A Psychological Approach for Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Directees*, 98.
- 9 Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle; or The Mansions*. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook. Notes and Introduction by Benedict Zimmerman, 3rd ed. 1. II:16,54.
- 10 Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn. *Love Is a Fire: The Sufi’s Mystical Journey Home*.
- 11 Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, 38.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 14 Janet K. Ruffing. *Spiritual Direction Beyond the Beginnings*, 41.
- 15 Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle; or The Mansions*. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook, *op. cit.*, 3. II:8, 73.
- 16 Giles, Mary. E. “Saint Teresa of Avila” in *Great Thinkers of the Western World*.

- 17 Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn. *The Seven Stations from the Book of Flashes by Sarraj*. Recorded at Omega Retreat, June, 2009. This series of talks describes seven basic principles needed by the wayfarer on the Sufi path, from Repentance to Poverty and finally to Acceptance. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee weaves these principles with examples of contemporary life, offering a way to live in relationship to the divine, keeping the attention of the heart and mind always turned towards God. Sarraj was a 10th century Sufi from the Iranian region of Khurasan. He wrote the first systematic exposition of Sufism as a way of life and thought. This ‘letting go’ is explained by Vaughan-Lee in talk 6 on Renunciation.
- 18 Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle; or The Mansions*. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook, *op. cit.*, 4. II:6, 101.
- 19 Cragg, LX 48, cited in Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction Beyond the Beginnings*, *op. cit.*, 95.
- 20 The ninth century Sufi mystic Mansur Al Hallaj (858-922) wrote a treatise on the heart in which he spoke about what has been translated by others as *le point vierge* (the virgin point) or the “last, irreducible, secret center of the heart where God alone penetrates”.
- 21 There are three aspects to sincere repentance. Repentance of the past is to see clearly our errors without rationalizing or making excuses. Repentance of the present is to make amends to anyone or anything injured by our past errors. Repentance of the future is to vow sincerely never to repeat that mistake again. The sign of God’s acceptance of our repentance is that those things that were so attractive to us in the past have become unattractive – God has taken that temptation from our hearts. Frager Robert, *Heart , Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1999) 71.
- 22 Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle; or The Mansions*. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook, *op. cit.*, 6.I: 1,154.
- 23 This whole section is taken from the book Frager Robert, *Heart , Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1999).
- 24 Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle; or The Mansions*. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook, *op. cit.*, 7.I:3, 263.
- 25 Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, 214.